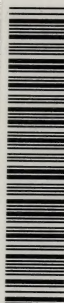


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Clan Wars . . .

in the

Old Highlands



BY

DAVID N. MACKAY

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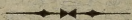
Clan Warfare

IN THE

Scottish Highlands

BY

DAVID N. MACKAY.



A Historical Record of the War Organisation of the Clans, with detailed accounts of the events at Clachnaharry (1454)—The Bloody Day (about 1484)—Blar-na-Paire (about 1489)—Blar-na-Leine (1544)—The Cave of Eigg (about 1577)—Altgawn (1586)—The Rhinns of Islay (1598)—Culleen (1601)—Carinish (1601)—Glenfinlas (1602)—Glenfruin (1603)—Castle Toward and Dunoon (1646)—Keppoch House and the Well of the Seven Heads (1663-65), and Mulroy (1688).

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Clan Wars in the Old Highlands

*(Read to the Gaelic Society of Inverness
on 29th November, 1916).*



It has long been the custom of historians to speak of Highlanders as "men of a fighting race." During the present war the valour and endurance of our Highland regiments, and of the thousands of North and West-country fishermen serving in H.M. Navy, have earned the admiration of friend and foe alike. It may be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that no part of the British Empire has surpassed in practical patriotism, in eager recruitment, or in sacrifice, the record of the Highland Counties of Scotland. It is natural to enquire why the men of Gaeldom have exhibited so keen and noble a spirit, surpassing even the deeds of their forefathers in the anti-Napoleonic campaigns. It is certainly not because they have been the pampered children of the Empire. Equally certainly, their gallantry has not been inspired by self-interest. They are among the poorest citizens of the United Kingdom, so far as worldly possessions are concerned. Nor have they been enthused by Imperialistic dreams. Their interests are domestic. The pageantry of Empire, as exhibited from time to time in the great cities of the the homeland, has never been displayed near their villages and islands. Whence, then, came this impulse to risk all, and to suffer the untold horrors of war, so voluntarily and heroically? Why was it that the Military Service Acts found so few eligible men remaining in the Highland districts?

The ill-informed observer will content himself by quoting the opinion of the historians that the Highlanders are a fighting race. By doing so he will do less than justice to the Gael, for his suggestion can only mean that Highlanders love fighting for its own sake, that they are by nature a combative people, and therefore a people with more bravery than sense. This idea, though commonly held, has no basis in fact. Highlanders have exercised a fairly sound discrimination in their military enthusiasms during the nineteenth century.

They have not shown any inclination to serve as soldiers of fortune, such as might have been expected from men of a merely pugnacious breed. Accordingly, while it is true that Highlanders have always given a good account of themselves in support of any cause for which they drew the sword, one may claim, and every true Highlander will claim, that their valour in the European War has not arisen from mere love of fighting, but from a sense of duty and responsibility.

At a time like this, however, when everything is organised on a war basis, we naturally enquire into the military records of our race, and it is my task to-night to discuss with you the days when clan wars were fought among our native hills, and to describe briefly the war organisation of those clans, and the reasons which produced strife.

Let me say at the outset that I cannot accept the view that the clan was primarily a war organisation. No doubt it is true that there was a time in the Highlands when men's first and last thoughts were of defence and offence; but in the clan period proper—from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century—war was far from being the main occupation of the clansmen. They had a well-developed communal life. They were not nomadic. They had definite systems of law. They had a literature of their own. They were as religious as their neighbours, and they had musical tastes of a high order. Unquestionably, they also had their wars, their hatreds, and their diplomacies. They were probably more prompt to resent an affront than were the Southern Scots, and they had long memories for records of injuries, but they were not a race of ignorant savages, living for war and by war, as most writers of history have imagined them to have been. Writers of fiction have found in the Highland warrior a romantic personage, and have described his qualities with dramatic skill rather than with accuracy. Historians have mainly failed even to attempt to ascertain the facts concerning Highland civilisation. They were familiar with South-country records of Highland incursions, and they then assumed that they knew all about the Highland character. It would be just as reasonable if a Frenchman professed to understand Indian civilisation after serving alongside Indian troops in France. As the result of my reading of Highland history, I am prepared to assert that while the Highlander of the clan period was a fearless and

determined soldier when there was fighting to be done, he did not fight more often, or more ruthlessly, than the men of other European races. If the records of the individual clans are examined, it will be found that their battles were not nearly so numerous as ignorant people imagine, and, as I shall show later on, that in matters of chivalry and observance of what are popularly known as "the laws of war" they had nothing to learn from English or Continental troops.

In war the fighting forces of a clan were led by the chief or captain. The term captain is frequently used in ancient writings, and is generally accepted as being at least as old as the title of chief.* Usually the captain was the chief, but if the latter were too old or too infirm to lead the clan in battle, he appointed a captain to act as his deputy. For all practical purposes we may regard the terms as synonymous. In the case of Clan Chattan the term captain is still generally used instead of the name chief. In war, as in peace, the authority of the chief was very great, but naturally he had to secure the consent of the clan, to whose goodwill he owed his recognition as chief, and by whose tacit consent he could alone maintain his authority. There is an old Gaelic proverb, "Stronger than the chief are his clansmen." A chief had to provide for the social well-being of his clan, and "maintain such who by accident are fallen to total decay" (Burt's Letters). If he failed conspicuously in either his civil or military capacity, his tenure of office was insecure. There are records of depositions, or clan revolutions, which show that the clan believed itself entitled to withdraw the rights of their chiefs, though of course there were families, such as the Colquhouns and the Campbells, who were able at an earlier date than the other leading families to substitute the feudal for the tribal system of government. Among clan chiefs proper there were several well-known instances of depositions. About 1460 Stewart of Garth was imprisoned by his followers because of his ferocious temper. In 1498 Iain Aluinn MacDonald of Keppoch was deposed because he gave up a clansman to the Mackintosh Chief contrary to the will of his own clansmen generally. Though he had sons, they were ignored, and he was succeeded by his uncle, and that uncle's descendants. Ferquhard, 9th

* Dr MacBain (Trans. of Gaelic Socy. of Invss., Vol. xvi.).

Chief of the Mackintoshes, found it convenient to renounce his position, because "his friends of the name of Clan Chattan were altogether dissatisfied with his way of managing affairs." His sons were not considered when a successor was chosen."* Dugald MacRanald of Island Tirrim was killed by his own men because "he made himself obnoxious, and his four sons were declared ineligible for the succession to the chiefship of Canranald."† It is clear that the lot of a Highland clansman was very different from that of the retainer of one of the Lowland "Families" of the same period. The former was a free member of an independent social organisation, while the latter lived in practical serfdom. The former had a share in the recognition of each new chief (though in practice the succession, by ancient Celtic law, was limited to those within three degrees of relationship to the last chief), while the latter was bound to feudal service under a legally appointed superior. It is true that the powers of a chief, when installed, were very far-reaching, but anything like tyranny was sure to end in disaster to the tyrant. In most clans there was a council, composed of experienced men, who advised the chief on questions of importance.

When on active service, the men of a clan, if too numerous to act as one body, were divided into two or more regiments. Each regiment was composed of various companies, each representing a certain district, and commanded, as a rule, by the chieftain of the cadet branch of the clan who administered the district in question. These cadet families enjoyed a considerable amount of independence. Thus the Aberach branch of the Clan Mackay was latterly in many ways a separate organisation from the branch which followed the chief of the senior Mackay family, though they usually took their place in the clan's councils and forces when great issues were at stake.

Prior to the introduction of fire-arms—about the close of the sixteenth century—the Highlanders used the bow with very considerable skill, but their main confidence was founded on the use of the axe (as at Bannockburn), and later of the sword—a broad-bladed cutting weapon, sometimes made for use with both hands.

* Dr MacBain (Trans. of Gaelic Socy. of Invs., Vol. xvi.).

† Book of Clan Donald, Vol. iii., p. 175.

Wyntour wrote in his "Chronicle," about 1400, an account of the famous combat on the North Inch at Perth, in which he says:—

" At Sanct Johnstone beside the Freris
All thai entrit in Barreris
With Bow and Ax, Knyf and Swerd,
To deil amang thaim thar last werd."

John Major (1512) says the clansmen " use a bow and quiver, and a halbert (a combination of spear and battle-axe) well sharpened, as they possess good veins of native iron. They carry large daggers placed under the belt." An Act of the Scottish Parliament, passed in 1574, dealing with weapon-shows, prescribed different war gear for Highlanders as compared with Lowlanders. The former were expected to have " habirschonis" (short sleeveless coats of mail), " steilbonettis" (steel caps), " swerdis" (swords), " bowis and dorlochis (bows and quivers), or " culveringis" (a long slender piece of hand artillery). It must not be assumed, however, that the ordinary warriors in a clan array were so well equipped. In addition to the sword or battle-axe on which they mainly relied, they usually carried a dirk or a smaller battle-axe on their right thighs. The Lochaber axe (a kind of pike) was not in general use throughout the Highlands, so far as I can ascertain. The shield was commonly used. It was made of bronze or leather-covered wood, and it was carried on the left arm, being sometimes provided with an arm-strap as well as a handle. Great skill was displayed in the use of the shield. The combatant's most valuable characteristic was coolness in action, so that he might defend himself with his shield and await the opening in his opponent's defence which gave an opportunity for a *coup-de-grâce* with the claymore. A blustering horse-soldier in the army of Montrose once offered to fight, with sword alone, any Highlander who would face him with sword and shield. A clansman (afterwards known as " Ranald of the Shield") at once accepted the challenge, but came forward with a dirk only, so confident was he in his prowess with his shield. The fate of the challenger is not recorded, but the wielder of the dirk came safely out of the fight, and lived to enjoy the new name which his self-confidence and skill had so well earned for him. The use of coats of mail was common among the chiefs and company officers, and occasionally

among the men also. Pitscottie tells us that in 1460 the forces of James II. were joined by the Earl of Ross with "ane great army of men, all armed in the Highland fashion, with halbershownes (short sleeveless coats of mail), bowes and axes." The Highlanders were slow in adopting fire-arms as part of their equipment. This was partly due, no doubt, to difficulties of supply, but was due also to the peculiarity of the Highland method of attack. The clansmen advanced towards an enemy at a fast walking-pace, released a flight of arrows, threw away their bows, and then began a fierce rush to close quarters with swords or axes. If the charge did not settle the matter (as it did at Glenfruin), a general *melee* took place (as at The Park, Blar-na-leine, and Mulroy), and the issue was seldom long in doubt. In warfare of this kind a musket did not offer any very distinct advantage as compared with the bow. A musket was a heavy weapon, with a short range, and was cumbersome to reload. A bow and arrows were of negligible weight on the march, were of no great value, and could be replaced very easily. It is noteworthy that even in the early years of the nineteenth century it was suggested that one of the Scottish regiments should carry the bow instead of the musket. In various historic encounters Highlanders armed with the ancient weapons of the Gael overcame regular soldiers equipped with fire-arms and bayonets. When the fight was going on, the chiefs and other leaders took their risks as freely as their men. One of the reasons for the contempt and hatred which Highlanders lavished on "the Butcher"—Cumberland—was probably his distant location during the fight at Culloden.

What, one may well ask, was the size of a clan array on the field of battle? In accounts of clan battles we seldom get any reliable estimate of the numbers engaged, but the number of old castles, and the other signs, show that in the old days the Highland population was large.

In J. A. Robertson's "Concise Historical Proofs" one finds some interesting figures, quoted from various sources. The strength of the clans which could have been raised for the Jacobite cause in 1704 is stated thus:—MacDonalds 1800, Macphersons 700, Mackenzies of Seaforth 1200, MacLeods 700, Frasers 1000, Roses of Kilravock 500, Rosses of Balnagown 300, Grants of Balindalich 300, Stewarts of Appin 200, Farquharsons 700, Chisholms 200, and so forth; total, 10,700. General

Wade's statement of the Highland forces who were out for the Pretender in 1715 was as follows:—Seaforth clans 3000, Macdonalds of Sleat 1000, Glengarry 800, Moidart 800, Kephoch 220, Camerons 800, MacLeods 1000, Gordons 1000, Stewarts of Appin 400, Robertsons of Struan 400, Mackintoshes and Farquharsons 800, &c.—in all, 14,140 men. The Campbells, Frasers, Grants, &c., “believed to be well affected to the Government,” totalled 8000—making 22,140 in all. These figures were mere estimates, of course, and need not be taken as representing the total possible man-power of the Highland counties.

The official estimate (usually credited to Lord President Forbes) of the number of men who could be brought out by Highland chiefs at the time of Prince Charles' Rising is interesting in this connection. The total number of men was given at 31,930, including 800 Mackintoshes, 400 Macphersons, 500 MacLeans, 200 MacLachlans, 600 Stewarts, 700 Macgregors (surely an over-estimate), 3000 Athol clansmen, 1300 Grants, 900 Frasers, 200 Chisholms, 2500 Mackenzies, 800 Mackays, 2330 MacDonalds, 800 Camerons, and 700 MacLeods. The “Stuart papers” state that about 12,000 properly armed Highlanders actually took the field for Prince Charles, and that those on the Hanoverian side were nearly equal in number. It seems clear that from the earliest times until the Highlands became the prey of land exploiters who were permitted to regard money-making as the chief end of man, the Northern Counties were inhabited by a large population who found a sufficient, though not a luxurious, living in regions which are now to a great extent desolate.

The physical endurance of the clan warriors was remarkable. Montrose's men, though ill-supplied with food, marched nearly 40 miles through by-paths among the snow-laden mountains on the night prior to their victory at Inverlochy, and made a continuous march of 90 miles in their retreat from the city of Dundee. Parts of the retreat of Prince Charles from Derby, pursued by several armies and by cavalry, provided a test of stamina which few armies could successfully sustain to-day. Highland armies marched three abreast.

The use of horses for military purposes was practically unknown. Each clansman carried his own food, or found it when on the march. The purely inter-clan campaigns were

short. A feud—like that between the Macgregors and the Colquhouns, or between the MacLeans and the MacDonalds of Dunnyveg—might go on for years, but it consisted of a series of short, energetic campaigns of a few days duration. Consequently the Highland soldiers who fought under Montrose and Dundee soon grew impatient when the campaigns showed signs of lasting for months. They were not above taking an unauthorised departure from the banner of a cause in which they had no direct or immediate concern, except that their chiefs had persuaded them to fight for it.

Discipline was very lax, according to modern standards. What held the men together in their tribal expeditions was their “clannishness,” as we now call it, rather than a hard and fast domination. Each revered his chief as the representative and upholder of the old traditions, and as the man to whom the clan’s destiny had been committed. They knew also that he was, during his lifetime, the divider of the clan lands. When they found themselves serving under a merely military leader they chafed at all restraints. Montrose and Dundee were able, with some success, to realise the clansman’s point of view. They adopted the methods of the clan leaders, and ruled their Highland retainers through the men’s own clan officers. When Colonel Cannon, after Dundee’s death, thought he could enforce ordinary military discipline, he very speedily learned that he could not do so. Many Highland companies revolted and went home; they were not prepared to accept orders from a mere Colonel.

What was the attitude of the clan warriors to the people of a conquered area? They certainly believed in the old war-adage, “The spoils to the victors.” When the Munros went south to Strathardle, about 1454, to avenge an insult to the Tutor of Foulis, they brought north with them the cattle of their conquered enemies, and incidentally had to fight a battle with the Mackintoshes near the modern village of Clachnaharry, as the result of disagreement concerning the “road collop”—or share of the spoil—which the latter clan should get for permitting the captured beastial to traverse their country. The MacDonalds of Clanranald raided the country of the Grants during the quarrel that culminated at Blar-na-leine in 1544. The MacDonalds made a clean sweep in the lands of Urquhart of Cromarty prior to the Battle of The Park about 1489. “Coll of the Cows” was the well-

justified name of the Keppoch chief who carried on a bitter feud with the Mackintoshes prior to Mulroy in 1688. The names of other raids and raiders will occur to any student of Highland history. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the clansmen were fonder of other people's cattle than were the men of armies generally, or that cattle-lifting was one of their chief sources of livelihood, as certain conscious and unconscious romancers would have us believe. Probably the rounding up of cattle belonging to hostile clans was considered a very reasonable, and even commendable, employment, just as privateering was deemed a fair enough profession when directed against Spain and France not so very long ago. Doubtless the Highlands produced outlaws and robbers in as natural a manner as did other regions, but there is no authority for the view that any of the well-known clans subsisted, even to a limited extent, on organised pillage in time of peace. Many of the Macgregors may have taken to criminal methods when they were denied the ordinary rights of citizenship after Glenfruin, but one cannot regard their position as normal. The Lowland conception of Highland character was based largely on the conduct of the Highlanders who were exploited by ambitious southern leaders like Montrose, Dundee, and Prince Charles, and who had the lax regard for the rights of property which prevails in some invading armies, even in our own time.

When we come to consider the conduct of clan armies towards the lives and liberties of non-combatants, we find, on the whole, that they did not practice a policy of "frightfulness." In some cases we have records of crime which cannot be condoned even on military grounds. The smothering of men, women, and children in the cave of Eigg towards the end of the 16th century was an outrage which cannot be forgiven. There are at least three traditions concerning church-burnings, when congregations are said to have been burned to death or massacred by suddenly-arriving enemies. If these traditions are based on fact, the perpetrators must be regarded as murderers, not warriors. It is impossible to say whether such events took place, but if a judicial attitude is to be maintained in dealing with Highland history, as I hope it will be maintained, one is bound to refer to the existence of these traditions. Let us bear in mind, however, that

the traditional basis of the best known of them—the alleged church-burning at Kilchrist or *Cillecriosd* (near Beaully)—has been to a large extent destroyed by the researches of Mr Kenneth MacDonald (Trs. of Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol. xv.). Let us also remember that brutal atrocities were perpetrated by most armies in those days, and that even the wars of the Covenanters were disgraced by unnecessary and wholesale massacres of non-combatants and surrendered troops. Nor should we forget that the man who killed some non-combatant onlookers after the battle of Glenfruin was so execrated by his Macgregor clansmen that ever after he was treated as a *pariah*—(see Sir Wm. Fraser's "Chiefs of Colquhoun," pp. 198-9). As regards outrages upon women, I rejoice to say that I know of no single instance of that type of crime in the war annals of the North. Nor do I know of any record of maiming or ill-using a child. There may have been criminals in Highland armies, but I assert, without fear of question, that the general ideas of chivalry which prevailed among fighting clansmen were at least as high as those held in contemporary armies in Britain or the Continent. If any one should think of reminding me of the treachery associated with the massacres at Dunaverty and Glencoe, I disclaim these events as not having occurred in clan wars, and as strengthening, by contrast, the claims I make concerning the soldierly qualities of Highland warriors among the clans.

It is on record that the Irvines of Drum and the MacLeans of Duart were wont to exchange courtesies from time to time during the fifteenth century. Why did they do so? The reason was that the heads of these families met in personal combat at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, and fought so desperately that each killed the other. Among barbarians this might have caused a blood-feud, but the families of the two men only saw reason for honouring the memory of the two victims, and for generations their successors in the chieftainship met on the anniversary of the fight and exchanged swords in token of their strangely-found friendship. We read that the Chief of the MacDonalds of Moidart interceded for the life of MacLean of Ardgor, when taken captive at the naval fight in The Bloody Bay near Tobermory, and put forward the strange but chivalrous plea that if Ardgor were dead "there would be no one left to bicker with," thus

showing that he would have appreciated the behest of a poet of our own day (Sir Henry Newbolt)—

“ To honour, while you strike him down,
The foe that comes with fearless eyes.”

On one occasion one of the Lamonts killed a son of a Macgregor chief in a wayside quarrel. The wrongdoer was pursued by some Macgregors, and, when nearly caught, sought help from an old gentleman, and received a promise of sanctuary. Soon it was ascertained that this benefactor was the father of the dead lad. But he had given his word, and he kept it, according to the honourable tradition of the North. Next day he conducted his guest to the borders of his domain and informed him that he could go in safety, but that for the future his life must be protected by his own sword alone. In later days the Lamonts more than repaid the debt of gratitude they owed to the Macgregor chief. (See “ Statistical Account,” 1845: Parish of Dunoon). Were these the methods of a barbarous race? In Highland story there are few more bitter pages than those that record the events of the feud between the MacLeans of Duart and the MacDonalds of Islay; yet when the latter clan was beset by the Campbells, the MacLeans came to the rescue. When the army of Prince Charles was passing near the Lothian residence of the Earl of Stair, the Prince became apprehensive lest the MacDonalds of Glencoe who were in his army might wreak upon the person or property of the family of Stair a belated vengeance for the Glencoe massacre of 1692. The Glencoe men became aware of the Prince's fears, and were so enraged that he should think them capable of such conduct that only special appeals and apologies prevented their immediate repudiation of the Jacobite cause. From an unexpected quarter we find a high compliment to the Gaels: “ The Highlanders, whom more savage nations called savage, carried in the outward expression of their manners the politeness of Courts, without their vices, and, in their bosoms, the high points of honour without its follies ” (Dalrymple's Memoirs).

As a matter of fact, the Kings and Courtiers of Edinburgh were about the last persons to whom Highlanders would have gone for instruction in the meaning of the phrase *Noblesse oblige*. In 1427 James I. summoned the Highland chiefs to

Inverness, where he was holding a Parliament. They obeyed the summons in good faith, but many of them were arrested on arrival. Two were beheaded and the rest were imprisoned. In 1540 King James V. performed a similar feat, inviting many chiefs (including the chief of my own clan) to go to the fleet in which he was visiting the Western Isles, and then clapping them under hatches until they gave hostages for future subservience, or chose to languish in southern jails. The men of the North did not readily forget these events and others of a similar character, though not attempted on so large a scale. These facts should not be forgotten when ignorant people represent our ancestors as a lawless race. They had, too often, the best of reasons for regarding the law as a mere instrument of tyranny. One of the chief causes of dispeace in the North was the Government's attempts to enforce the feudal system, which in so many districts was regarded as an alien and hateful *regime*. Thus a line of conduct which was patriotic in the glens looked rebellious and lawless in the capital. Seen in his own home country, the clansman was usually a more impressive figure than when described in the literature of Edinburgh. In 1688 William Sachaverell, Governor of the Isle of Man, who presumably was a man of affairs, visited Mull on one of the many treasure-hunts for the Armada ship "Florida." In 1702 he published an account of his experiences. "During my stay," he says, "I generally observed the men to be large-bodied, stout, subtle, active, patient of cold and hunger. There appeared in all their actions a certain generous air of freedom, and contempt of those trifles, luxury and ambition, which we so servilely creep after. They bound their appetites by their necessities, and their happiness consists, not in having much, but in coveting little. The women seem to have the same sentiments with the men; though their habits (dresses) were mean, and they had not our sort of breeding, yet in many of them there was a natural beauty and a graceful modesty which never fails of attracting. . . . Perhaps no nation goes better armed, and I assure you they will handle them with bravery and dexterity, especially the sword and target, as our veterane regiments found to their cost at Gillecrankie."

These observations deal with the last days of the clan period, but I believe that in the main they are not inappli-

cable to the whole of it. Yet the clans had their wars, in which blood was freely spilt. How did these wars originate? Let me give a few facts, and then proceed to draw some reasonable inferences. The famous fight at The Park, near Strathpeffer, about 1489, arose out of the circumstances following the forfeiture of the Earldom of Ross in 1476, and is said by one account to have had its immediate cause in a gross insult by the Mackenzies to a MacDonald lady who had married a Mackenzie. The MacLean-Cameron feud at the end of the fifteenth century had its origin in an earlier grant to the MacLeans of Coll by Alexander, Lord of the Isles, of certain Cameron lands (Hugh MacDonald's MS., and "History of the Camerons"). The MacDonalds of Sleat had a bitter feud with the MacLeods of Harris in the 16th century and in the first years of the 17th, arising out of the disputed possession of the lands of Trouterness (Trotternish), of which the former claimed immemorial possession, but to which the MacLeods procured a Charter under the Great Seal in 1498 (Reg. of Great Seal, xiii., 305). The battle of Blar-na-leine, between the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald and the Frasers, Grants, &c., had its origin in the kidnapping of the Clan Ranald Chief by King James V. in 1540. The Frasers supported a man whom the MacDonalds regarded as a usurping chief, and when the real one (John Moidartach) returned, a series of campaigns resulted, culminating in the bloody conflict at Blar-na-leine (Kinlochlochy) in 1544 (Gordon's "Family of Sutherland," p. 109; MS. "History of the Frasers" in Advocates' Library, &c.). The civil war among the MacLeans in 1561, with its aftermath in 1596, arose from the claim of the MacLeans of Coll to independence as regards their former allegiance to MacLean of Duart, in respect that Coll now held his lands direct from the Crown under a feudal title. The long and bloody feud between the MacDonalds of Islay and the MacLeans of Duart originated in rival claims to the Rhinns of Islay, founded on disputed feudal claims. The Stewart-Campbell feud—which lasted in one form or another for 200 years—originated in the murder of Campbell of Calder, as the result of a political conspiracy in which John Stewart of Appin and other Highland chiefs were implicated. The bitter quarrel between the Colquhouns and Clan Gregor, which preceded the latter's victory at Glenfruin, near Loch Lomondside, in 1603, is said to have

had its origin in reprisals by the Macgregors for the hanging by the Colquhouns of two Macgregors who, through hunger, became sheep-stealers nearly a hundred years before that date. The dispute between the MacDonalds of Glengarry and the Mackenzies of Kintail, which lasted into the 17th century, was a territorial one, connected with the disputed ownership of certain lands in Wester Ross. The alleged Church-burning at Cillecriosd, if it did take place, was an episode of this contest. The Mackintoshes and Macdonalds of Keppoch were at enmity, and on various occasions at war, in connection with the disputed ownership of certain lands in Lochaber which had always been inhabited by Keppoch's men, but to which the Mackintoshes had feudal title-deeds. As recently as the year 1688 this quarrel was fought out in the battle at Mulroy, when Coll of the Cows defeated the Mackintoshes—and fought the last of all clan battles.

Such were the causes of some of the chief clan wars on record. I have taken these instances at random. To what conclusion do these records lead us? Can anyone seriously suggest that these wars were less justifiable, or less explicable, according to the ordinary standards of human conduct, than, let us say, the various wars waged by Great Britain in the nineteenth century? No doubt wiser men than our Highland ancestors could have settled all these quarrels without hacking each other with claymores. But can admirers of modern forms of Imperialism and militarism afford to point the finger of scorn at the warring Gaels and call them barbarians? On the contrary, the clans, who at times hated each other as heartily, as blindly, and as "patriotically" as the nations of Europe have been accustomed to do, have been much more expeditious than the great nations in substituting legal and social arbitraments for those of the sword. It is interesting to observe how frequently the cause of clan quarrels is found in the fact that an area which belonged to one clan by racial possession had become the feudal property of another by mere legal convention. In this respect, and in many respects, the history of the Highland clans might form a very important branch of study for those who some day will have to settle the problems raised by the present European War. The lesson of clan history, and also of European history, is shortly this—that every social unit which does not own its own soil,

and choose its own destiny, is, and must always be, a continuing source of danger to the general peace.

Such is a brief survey of the clan period in the Highlands—a period of which, with all its tragedies, we have no reason to feel ashamed. Our ancestors were not merely a fighting race; they were a manly, and in some respects a noble, race, worthy of better treatment than the British nation has thought fit for them, worthy of a happier fate than evicting chiefs and alien landlords have provided for them. Let us see to it that the valour of Highlanders from the homeland, and from the Colonies to which their ancestors were driven, shall not go unrewarded, and that our Highland counties shall again become the home of a great race, numerous, prosperous, and free.





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With Compliments from

David N. Mackay.

219, St. Vincent Street,
Glasgow, August 1922

